

Statement of

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before the

Subcommittee on Federal Workforce and Agency Organization
United States House of Representatives

on

Travel vs. Terrorism: Federal Workforce Issues in Managing Airport Security

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Background

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today on the process used by Office of Personnel Management (OPM) to conduct background investigations for personnel at the Transportation Security Administration (TSA).

The Office of Personnel Management's mission is to ensure the Federal Government has an effective civilian workforce. Having an effective workforce means having a workforce made up of people with varying degrees of responsibility; therefore, requiring varying degrees of background investigations to ensure they meet the Government's suitability requirements. At OPM, we are responsible for investigating every type of position in Government -- everything from low risk/low Public Trust positions like mail clerks and customer service representatives to high risk/high Public Trust positions like auditors and nuclear materials handlers.

At OPM, the division responsible for handling these cases is our Federal Investigative Services Division (FISD), headquartered in Boyers, Pennsylvania. This division supports hundreds of Federal agency security offices worldwide. Its automated processing systems and vast network of field investigators handle a high volume of cases. In fact, we processed over 1.4 million investigations last year.

In the last few years, as investigations have become an even more significant aspect of our mission, the number of OPM employees and contractors working on them has risen dramatically. In February 2005, the Department of Defense (DoD) transferred responsibility for its personnel security investigations program, including 1,800 investigative staff, from DoD to OPM. The move consolidated the vast majority of background investigations for the Federal Government with OPM.

Processing Background Checks for Airport Personnel

OPM conducts investigations for TSA on Federal and contract airport screeners. When conducting background investigations on these positions, we work closely with Transportation Security Agency (TSA) personnel. On the other hand, TSA conducts background checks for specific categories of workers-- including those needing unescorted access to what is referred to as Security Identification Display Areas (SIDA) of an airport.

Currently, TSA submits fingerprints to OPM for airport screener applicants as a selection tool prior to initiating a full background investigation. TSA also has OPM conduct the Access National Agency Check and Inquiries (ANACI) investigation on airport screeners. This type of investigation includes a search of national record repositories, such as the FBI fingerprint and investigative records and Department of Defense's investigative index, a credit check, search of

military records, birth verification, and a check of immigration and naturalization records.

Additionally, OPM sends letters of inquiry to employers, local police departments, schools, and personal references to confirm the subjects' background claims and to obtain information about their basic suitability for employment. Field investigators are sent to conduct local criminal history inspections of a subject if no response is received from police departments where the subject lived, worked, or attended school. Between 2003 and 2006, OPM scheduled over 76,000 ANACI investigations on airport screeners of which 1,700 closed with major issues that were referred to TSA for adjudication.

Conclusion

As part of the Government's effort to secure our Nation the Office of Personnel Management's role is critical. We take this responsibility seriously and are committed to ensuring the Federal Government has an effective workforce.

Mr. Chairman this concludes my remarks. I am happy to answer any questions you or members of the Subcommittee may have.